

Agenda Item 13.1

Relations with other Bodies

Reports by the Secretariat, Parties and  
Partners

Information Document 13.1

**Reports of Representation of  
ASCOBANS at Meetings**

**Action Requested**

- Take note

Submitted by

Secretariat



**NOTE:  
DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED  
TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**



## Reports of Representation of ASCOBANS at Meetings

3 October 2013

### HELCOM Ministerial Meeting

#### Participation for ASCOBANS: Penina Blankett (Finland)

The Ministers of the Environment and High-Level Representatives of the nine Baltic coastal countries and the European Union met in Copenhagen on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

- **Biodiversity-related issues in the meeting and in the ministerial declaration**

The meeting adopted one recommendation for the protection of birds "34E/1 Safeguarding important bird habitats and migration routes in the Baltic Sea from negative effects of wind and wave energy production at sea" and the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy.

The HELCOM Copenhagen Ministerial Declaration also contains actions **on Baltic marine protected areas**. Some of them target fisheries practices with negative impacts in protected areas and others target an overall upgrading of the network of protected areas. The network of Baltic Sea protected areas has increased fourfold and now covers about twelve per cent of the marine area. Five new areas have been established as Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) since 2010, and there is a promising trend in establishing management plans for protected areas. Despite the good progress, according to the assessment carried out in 2010, the network of protected areas was not yet ecologically coherent. Moreover, no progress has been made since 2010 regarding the HELCOM 2010 target to include more off-shore areas under the protection regime.

Furthermore, **conservation plans for species, habitats and biotopes which are at risk of extinction will be developed**. About four per cent of Baltic Sea species and about a quarter of biotopes are under the risk of extinction. More specifically, there are 69 species out of the 1753 evaluated species and 59 biotopes out of 209 assessed biotopes that are under such risk. Overall, the target of favourable conservation status of biodiversity has not been reached. All the knowledge gained during the five-year-long process to assess the extinction threat, which was carried out by the HELCOM expert network, will enable more effective protection of the Baltic Sea biodiversity.

New ways of protecting biodiversity include a regional action plan for **marine litter**, to be developed within two years. The action plan has measures targeted at reducing marine litter from its main sources, along with measures for working with industries to reduce or phase out microbeads in certain products. Micro-sized litter is a particular problem in the Baltic Sea and is also a potential carrier agent of hazardous substances, and thus a threat to organisms.

The meeting decided on actions on negative impacts of **underwater noise**. There was agreement that the level of underwater noise should not have negative impacts on marine life, and now there is a common understanding about the measures to be taken for gaining knowledge on this issue and for taking relevant actions

- **Harbour porpoise-related issue in the declaration**

The proposal coming from the Jastarnia group to have the harbour porpoise mentioned in the declaration was included and it was adopted as part of the declaration as follows:

**“– take decisive action to work towards a favourable conservation status of the harbor porpoise based on implementation of the CMS ASCOBANS Jastarnia Plan for the harbor porpoise in the Baltic Sea, in particular by addressing the pressing problem of by-catch;”**

All documents from the Ministerial meeting are available on the HELCOM [website](#).

### 9-11 October 2013

#### **CMS Scientific Council Strategic and Planning Meeting**

##### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Borja Heredia (Secretariat)**

No points of direct relevance to ASCOBANS were discussed. The report of the meeting can be accessed on the [meeting page](#) of the CMS website.

### 14-18 October 2013

#### **Seventeenth meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-17)**

The full report of the meeting is accessible [here](#).

### 15-17 October 2013

#### **Seventh Meeting of *ad hoc* HELCOM Seal Expert Group (HELCOM SEAL 7/2013)**

##### **Participation for ASCOBANS: Penina Blankett (Finland)**

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Anders Galatius, Denmark

- **Country reports:**

**Poland:** A project of WWF Poland, in cooperation with the Hel Marine Station of the University of Gdansk, on acoustic detection of harbour porpoises in the southern part of the Gulf of Gdańsk is ongoing. Fishing with gillnets is being investigated in the same area to assess the potential threat of by-catch. An analysis of the effectiveness of pinger use in the Polish waters of the ICES area 24 in accordance with Regulation 812/2004 has been done. Another Polish study is looking into the current format of fishermen's logbooks, as they are currently not suitable for reporting the by-catch of marine mammals. A new museum dedicated to the Baltic harbour porpoise has been opened by the Hel Marine Station and other public awareness-raising projects have been conducted.

**Denmark:** Last summer a ship-based survey was conducted in the gap area, containing the inner Danish waters, the western part of the German coast and parts of the western Swedish coast. Earlier on, data on harbour porpoises between 1994 and 2005 were filtered and the estimated numbers for individuals are as follows: 28 000 porpoises in 1994; 10 500 in 2005 and 18 500 in 2012. Although there are no significant differences among these point estimates, a Bayesian modelling exercise has resulted in an estimate of 80% probability of decline of the species in the area since the year 1994.

- **By-catch and stranded porpoises**

The Meeting took note of the information that WWF Poland, in cooperation with the Hel Marine Station, records the number of dead and alive seals and harbour porpoises, and that the data is sent to ASCOBANS. Poland also stated that they report the number of stranded porpoises to ASCOBANS annually.

- **HELCOM Red List work**

The HELCOM Red List of species in danger of becoming extinct and the associated Species Information Sheets (SISs), together with the related publications for biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes, have now been approved for publishing by HELCOM. These can be downloaded from HELCOM's web pages, along with the biotope/habitat assessment and the Technical Report on the HELCOM Underwater Biotope and habitat classification.

- [HELCOM Red List of Baltic Sea species in danger of becoming extinct](#)
- [HELCOM HUB - Technical report on the HELCOM Underwater Biotope and habitat classification](#)
- [Red List of Baltic Sea underwater biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes](#)

- **HELCOM–ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database**

HELCOM SEAL 4/2010 agreed to review the status of the harbour porpoise database in each future meeting of HELCOM SEAL and the meeting noted that no updates have been received during the year 2013. The Meeting took note of the empty reporting table (document 7/1) available for reporting purposes of the Contracting Parties.

It was suggested to use only acoustic and other systematically obtained monitoring data from the high density areas for harbour porpoises, i.e. Swedish areas along the Swedish west coast, all inner-Danish waters, as well as German waters west of the northern tip of Rügen, when reporting to the harbour porpoise database, and it was agreed to discuss this issue with ASCOBANS.

Ms Penina Blankett, Finland, informed the meeting that ASCOBANS has also been concerned that there have been only very few updates to the harbour porpoise database and also encouraged the Contracting Parties to submit updates to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi). Ms Blankett regretted the situation as it took hard work to establish the database.

- **Revision of HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 “Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area”**

The 34th Meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM 34/2013) adopted the revised and amended Recommendation 17/2 “Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area” that was endorsed by HELCOM HOD 37/2012.

- **Report from the ASCOBANS work**

The Meeting took note of the activities related to Baltic Sea harbour porpoises under ASCOBANS and the Jastarnia Plan, as presented by Ms Penina Blankett, Finland.

The meeting documents are available on the HELCOM [website](#).

## **5-8 November 2013**

### **5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Contracting Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP5)**

#### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat)**

A variety of issues relevant for the collaboration between ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS were discussed. In particular:

#### **Item 11 b) Work Programme 2014-2016**

Under this item, the ToR for the Joint MSFD Working Group were endorsed. They had been substantially changed during the ASCOBANS AC Meeting and now following ACCOBAMS' approval, work could commence properly. ACCOBAMS still had to identify a co-chair from their side (for ASCOBANS it was Sinead Murphy, Zoological Society of London). Parties asked the two Secretariats to work together in estimating the time needed and finding a co-chair. ACCOBAMS would also be looking into the possibility of hiring a consultant to move this issue forward.

On a related issue, the Work Plan included a point asking ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS to work together in trying to improve collaboration with the European Commission. The Work Plan suggested that CMS could assist in this, too. CMS was therefore requested to look into

ways of supporting ACCOBAMS' and ASCOBANS' efforts to collaborate more closely with the European Commission.

#### Item 12 e) Conservation of Cuvier's Beaked Whales in the Mediterranean

The main discussion under this item related to draft Res. 5.13, which underwent substantive redrafting by a sessional drafting group. The Joint Noise Working Group was asked to develop implementable measures to reduce impacts of intense noise activities within areas identified as of special concern for consideration by the next MOP. This needs to be added to the Group's ToR.

The co-chair of the joint Noise Working Group criticized that the draft resolution, even though mainly related to noise, was not consulted on with the WG before its submission to the MOP. He urged that in future the relevant WGs would be given the opportunity to review, if not develop/be involved in developing directly relevant draft resolutions.

#### Item 12 g) Impact of Anthropogenic Noise

The same sessional drafting group dealing with the Cuvier's resolution also considered draft Res. 5.15 on Underwater Noise. Appropriate references, e.g. to CMS Res.10.24, were included in the preamble, and Parties were called on to consider in their national legislation 1) EIAs that take full account of effects of activities on cetaceans, 2) implementation of Best Available Technique (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP), and 3) integrating noise in management plans of MPAs.

The resolution endorses the proposal to include CMS in the Joint Noise Working Group, clearing the way for approaching the Scientific Council officially.

The Resolution also adds two points to the ToR of the Joint Noise Working Group, which were subsequently in consultation with ASCOBANS Parties amended accordingly.

#### Other Matters

Marie-Christine Grillo-Compulsione will retire at the end of the year. A resolution in tribute to her immense contribution to ACCOBAMS and cetacean conservation in the region was proposed and passed by the Parties

The full report of the meeting can be accessed on the [ACCOBAMS website](#).

### **27-28 November 2013**

#### **41<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee**

##### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Borja Heredia & Melanie Virtue (Secretariat)**

The following is an extract from the Draft Report of the 41<sup>st</sup> CMS Standing Committee Meeting. The full report of the meeting can be accessed on the [CMS website](#).

##### *10. Resource Mobilization*

48. Finally, the Secretariat wanted to launch the "Migratory Species Champion Programme" for the CMS Family. The Programme had already been approved by the AEWA Standing Committee and ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. The concept note for the scheme had been circulated some months before and its main aim was to address the lack of a solid funding stream by broadening the base of donors and to provide greater visibility for CMS and its activities. Potential "Champions" would be asked to make a three-year commitment of an amount above a predetermined minimum and rather than sponsoring a specific activity they would be agreeing to support a wider portfolio. In return for their support, Champions would be officially recognized by CMS. Side events would be organized at the COP and similar events to promote the scheme and Ambassadors asked to help recruit "Champions". CMS was liaising closely with BirdLife International which operated a similar scheme; this would mean CMS could learn lessons from BLI's experience and the two organizations could

work together rather than compete. The Committee endorsed the “Migratory Species Champion Programme”.

*18. CMS instruments: Progress report on activities*

ASCOBANS

167. Mr Heredia (Secretariat) said that the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee had met in Warsaw in September, where the Action Plans for the three sub-regions were discussed and where it was agreed to extend the ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Joint Working Group on underwater noise to include CMS as well. A workshop on underwater noise would be organized to take place during the European Cetacean Society’s Annual Conference in 2014. The Agreement would also participate in the 2014 “WhaleFest” in Brighton, UK.

**9-13 December 2013**

**20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals**

**Participation for ASCOBANS: Mark Simmonds (HSI)**

The Society for Marine Mammalogy holds its international meetings every two years, with the goal of enhancing collaboration, sharing ideas, and improving the quality of research on marine mammals within the scientific community. Members from the USA comprise approximately 50% of the membership and, hence, the Society tends to meet in the USA at least every other year. The theme of this 20<sup>th</sup> conference was ‘Marine Mammal Conservation: Science Making a Difference’. The conference included 357 talks and some 400 posters<sup>1</sup>. Over a thousand people attended and are thought to have come from more than 30 countries.

The meeting opened with a resounding key note presentation: ‘How to succeed at marine mammal conservation’ by Barbara Taylor from the South West Fisheries Science Centre. Her presentation is available online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TFMe19ivlw>

Given the location and the focus of the conference, not surprisingly much attention was paid to the conservation of Hector’s dolphins and their endangered subspecies the Maui’s dolphin. The species is predicted to continue to decline and unless urgent action is taken, Maui’s dolphin is likely to become the next dolphin to reach extinction. Another focus was the ongoing work trying to stop New Zealand sea lions being drowned in the trawl nets of the sub-Antarctic squid fishery around the Auckland Islands. With the sea lion population declining by 40% over the past decade, the New Zealand Government has put in place a number of mitigation measures. On the back of these changes, fisheries managers recently concluded that squid fishing is no longer impacting on the sea lions but, unfortunately, evidence to support this claim is said to be lacking.

Other keynote presentations included: management of Australian sea lion deaths in a shark gillnet fishery (Dr Simon Goldsworthy South Australian Research and Development Institute); the role of science and international collaboration in (vaquita) dolphin conservation in the Gulf of California (Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho from Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático in Mexico); conservation of marine mammals in the 21st century (Andrew Read from Duke University); and the interaction between science and politics in New Zealand (former Dunedin North Labour MP and former Government Minister Pete Hodgson). Two winners of SMM awards also presented keynote talks on their research on the impact of

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<sup>1</sup> The poster book and programme for the conference are still available online here:  
[http://www.marinemammalscience.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=680&Itemid=354](http://www.marinemammalscience.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=680&Itemid=354)

climate change on polar bears (Ian Stirling from the University of Alberta), and habitat use in Stellar sea lions (Gina Himes-Boor from Montana State University).

The host, the University of Otago, provided presentations on topics including bottlenose dolphin breeding and survival in Fiordland; male behaviour of spinner dolphins in Egypt; distribution of New Zealand blue whales; calving in New Zealand southern right whales; Hector's dolphin distributions; impacts of human-induced sound on whales and dolphins; impact of tourism and research on dolphins in Egypt; tourism impacts on Fiordland dolphins; dolphin tooth morphology; dietary analysis of New Zealand sea lions; Hector's dolphin diet and habitat selection and southern right whale breeding at the Auckland Islands.

Workshops were run in the two days preceding the main conference and considered the following topics:

- The Second biennial workshop on science and conservation of Hawaiian odontocetes
- The sixth international sirenian symposium
- Top twenty research questions of global importance for cetacean conservation  
Assessing bycatch in fisheries in the Pacific Islands region
- Best practice principles for monitoring the effect of coastal development on marine mammals
- Can the cloud save the whales?
- Conservation biology of Right Whales
- Marine mammal tourism
- Integrating Marine Mammal Conservation: Human Dimensions and the Practitioner
- Cognition and Self-awareness in Cetaceans: A review of ethical implications for conservation laws
- Cachalote Consortium: A global perspective on sperm whale research
- Cetacean Mass Stranding Response 2: Rescue and research
- Finding Nemo: Exploring and speculating how whales use sensory perception to make a living in a vast ocean
- Impacts of cetacean tagging: A review of follow up studies and approaches
- Marine Mammal Genomics: Applications to evolution, ecology, and conservation
- Structural-functional shifts in marine mammals, present and past

The 20<sup>th</sup> Conference also held two plenary panel events which attracted much attention and some controversy. The first considered the humane killing of marine mammals. The purpose of this panel discussion was not to attempt a consensus or agree on a Society position, but instead to 'educate members with regard to current scientific perspectives on these complex technical, ethical and cultural issues'. The second panel event was entitled 'Scientific Studies of Captive and Free-living killer whales'. Its goals were: 1) To provide an overview of scientific data collected from free-ranging and captive killer whales; and 2) To offer an opportunity for experts to discuss comparative aspects of killer whale biology in these two environments and the implications thereof.<sup>2</sup>**4-7 February 2014**

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<sup>2</sup> There is a write up of this event here: <http://weforg.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/panelkwenglish.pdf> and comment on this Panel event by the Animal Welfare Institute here: <https://awionline.org/awi-quarterly/2014-winter/panel-raises-orca-captivity-questions-society-marine-mammalogy-conference>

## ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (ICES WGBYC)

### Participation for ASCOBANS: Kelly Macleod (United Kingdom) & Geneviève Desportes (ASCOBANS North Sea Plan Coordinator)

The Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) met in Copenhagen at ICES headquarters, 4-7 February 2014. The meeting was chaired by Bram Couperus (Netherlands) and was attended by 13 members from ten nations. This was the final year of Bram's position as chair; Marjorie Lyssikatos (formerly Rossman) from the United States was appointed as the new Chair.

WGBYC continues to collate and review annual information on bycatch of protected species under the requirements of EC Regulation 812/2004. WGBYC also continues to coordinate bycatch monitoring and mitigation trial data and reviews and disseminates information on methodologies associated with these broad topics. The European Commission has carried out two reviews of Regulation (EC) No 812/2004 - COM (2009) 268 and COM (2011) 578 as required under Article 7 of Regulation 812/2004. The Commission's long-term intention is to move away from a central regulation and incorporate the main elements of Regulation 812/2004 (i.e. monitoring and mitigation) into other regulatory frameworks. This is consistent with the objective under the new CFP of moving to regionalised decision making, where measures are tailored to different fisheries and agreed upon at the regional level.

At the 2014 meeting, WGBYC compiled and assessed data from Member States' 2013 reports (data relevant to 2012) as required under Regulation 812/2004 and/or from the Data Collection Framework (DCF) monitoring with the aims of identifying fisheries with incidental catches of cetaceans and where further mitigation measures are needed; as in previous reports, information for this activity remains patchy. Furthermore, it does not necessarily allow any accurate or precise assessment of the impact of incidental catch on most cetacean populations. However, there are some data that have proven useful for a preliminary evaluation of the potential impact fisheries bycatch may be having on certain cetacean and protected fish populations. In addition, changes to the design of the DCF are expected to be adopted in 2015. Changes will stipulate minimum requirements for monitoring of target and non-target species (including protected species) with greater plasticity at the regional level for tailoring monitoring to meet the needs of Member States, national and wider European obligations. The extent to which these new developments will impact future quantity and quality of data available to WGBYC for evaluating levels of bycatch for various protected species is unknown.

Following on the work developed by WKREV812 and building off of progress made during WGBYC 2013 meeting (ICES, 2013), a preliminary evaluation of estimated bycatch rates for North Sea harbour porpoise was conducted where expected bycatch rates were compared to four different thresholds to evaluate possible risk to this management unit. *Without any measure of uncertainty, preliminary results* of the bycatch risk approach (BRA) show that North Sea harbour porpoise may be near or above sustainable removal levels. WGBYC is still awaiting guidance from the EC on setting target removal levels for protected species so impacts from fisheries interactions can be fully evaluated. WGBYC agreed to continue with the BRA focussing on how to incorporate uncertainty into the assessment where possible.

WGBYC continues to strive for annual improvements to its database developed to store data on sampling, total effort, and bycatch of protected species at various resolutions (métiers) to facilitate reporting on the effectiveness of Regulation 812/2004 and assessment of bycatch impacts. Members of the ICES Data Centre attended the WGBYC 2014 meeting to discuss some issues in relation to data held by the centre. In summary it is not currently possible for ICES to provide comprehensive fishing effort data but WGBYC agreed it would endeavour to make data requests to determine the extent of effort data available from ICES.

The final report of the meeting is available [here](#).

## 17-21 February 2014

### OSPAR Biodiversity Committee (BDC)

#### Participation for ASCOBANS: Netherlands

The OSPAR Biodiversity Committee (BDC) met on 18-22 February 2014 in The Hague, the Netherlands. Here follows a small selection of the outcomes.

*Recommendations on furthering the protection and conservation of threatened and declining species and habitats.*

In 2008, OSPAR agreed to protect 42 species and 16 habitats under threat or in decline in the North-east Atlantic. The Contracting Parties agreed to develop Recommendations for actions that could be taken either individually or collectively to improve the state of these species and habitats.

The threats that these species and habitats face range widely with the many uses of the sea – from local scale physical damage to their environment, to plastic debris finding its way from land into the sea. Plastic bags and other marine litter can be a significant threat to several of the species, such as cetaceans and turtles.

The Recommendations cover a range of actions, such as identifying and protecting areas that have particular importance, taking measures to reduce pressures from specific human activities or conducting scientific research to increase our understanding of these species. By the end of 2013 such actions and measures had been adopted for just over half of the features on the list.

In December 2013 the OSPAR Commission adopted recommendations which include some of our most iconic species, the blue whale, the harbour porpoise and two species of sea turtle that come to the North-east Atlantic to feed. Other species are perhaps less well-known but equally remarkable, such as the Ocean Quahog – a deep sea clam that has been known to live for as long as five hundred years.

Another number of Recommendations was finalized in The Hague and approved in Cascais this year including littoral chalk communities – one of the best examples of which are the White Cliffs of Dover.

#### *Effectiveness of implementation*

Discussion on the reporting of implementation triggered a broader discussion relating to challenges being faced in the implementation of the species and habitats work within BDC. A working Group was established (ICG POSH on following up on implementation measures for the protection and conservation of species and habitats)

#### *Marine Protected Areas*

On Marine Protected Areas BDC noted that no new nominations had been made to the OSPAR network. OSPAR 2013 published an assessment of the ecological coherence of the OSPAR network of MPAs (product 18). It concluded that whilst the OSPAR network is not yet coherent, there are positive signs that progress was being made towards that goal. BDC also agreed that it would also be preferable to look into how to progress towards an integrated assessment to meet OSPAR and European Directive reporting requirements (as well as meeting OSPAR's own requirements).

#### *Coordinated biodiversity assessment and monitoring ICG COBAM*

The MSFD continued to be the major driver for coordination in biodiversity assessment and monitoring within OSPAR during the last intersessional period.

#### *Indicator development and testing*

There continues to be a significant effort underway to make progress on the development and testing of biodiversity indicators for use across OSPAR. BDC 2014 agreed that there is

broad support for its ambition to establish common or coordinated monitoring where this is appropriate

BDC noted the process for finalization of the collective arrangement with NEAFC. This will provide the framework for the future work on how to address management of MPAs in areas outside of national jurisdiction.

The full report of the meeting is available from the [OSPAR website](#).

## 10-13 March 2014

### ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (ICES WGMME)

#### Participation for ASCOBANS: Eunice Pinn (United Kingdom)

The Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) met at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), Quissett Campus, Massachusetts, USA from 10 March to 14 February 2014 to consider the majority of the Terms of Reference. A satellite meeting was held in Oban, Scotland, UK from 11 March to 13 March 2014 specifically to consider the Term of Reference on monitoring for renewable installations. This was chaired by Steven Benjamins.

WGMME annually reviews new information on abundance and distribution of marine mammals and in recent years such work has been linked to the development of targets and indicators for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive through specific requests from the European Commission and OSPAR. Given the focus on European waters in recent years, in 2014, a review of the abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the western North Atlantic was also undertaken. This specifically included North Atlantic right whale, harbour porpoise and white-sided dolphin.

Two special requests were received from OSPAR. The first requested a review of interactions between aquaculture and marine mammals, including the identification of the pressures and impacts which have sufficient documentation to necessitate the implementation relevant monitoring. Examples of effective management and mitigation solutions were also outlined. The second special request was for the provision of technical and scientific advice on options for ways of setting targets for the OSPAR common MSFD indicators for marine mammals and to provide examples of the application of these options. The advice also considered target setting options, the consequences that these may have for the monitoring programme (including spatial and temporal implications) and also the precision necessary in target setting and monitoring.

Building on earlier requests from the European Commission and OSPAR on the development of indicators and targets for determining Good Environmental Status (GES) and work undertaken by WGMMEW in 2012 and 2013, management units were further reviewed and delineated for cetaceans and seals. Boundaries were specified so that the management units can be populated with abundance and bycatch estimates, where appropriate. As previously agreed, these boundaries coincide with ICES Area/Division boundaries and/or OSPAR boundaries where possible. Much of the current surveillance and monitoring of marine mammals in Europe will potentially contribute to MSFD monitoring programmes/indicator assessments. However, to be successful, monitoring programmes require clearly defined objectives, good design (based on power analysis) and well-articulated reference points/targets and indicators. In addition, there should be a well-defined mechanism to translate results into management actions to meet and policy objectives and a feedback mechanism to evaluate the success of the process. Targets need to be set in relation to reference levels and conservation objectives, while recognising the limits of statistical power to detect change based on logistically feasible monitoring.

Following work on work over the last four years on the impacts of renewable energy developments on marine mammals and monitoring needs, approaches to marine mammal survey design used during pre-consent data gathering and post-consent monitoring in the offshore marine renewables (wind, wave, tide) industry were outlined and reviewed. There is a wide range of monitoring methodologies available to assess marine mammals at marine renewable energy development sites, but not all techniques are equally appropriate to all sites. Moreover, assessing the suitability of techniques and the quality of resulting survey data can be hampered by incomplete reporting of methodological details by developers. Commercial sensitivities may further complicate efforts by regulators and others to compare monitoring techniques on their respective merits. Despite this, regulators and policymakers should require the use of open, transparent and reproducible survey and monitoring methodologies to assess potential impacts of such developments on marine mammals.

The WGMME report can be found [here](#) and the ICES advice to OSPAR [here](#).

#### **14-16 March 2014**

##### **WhaleFest 2014**

###### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat)**

Information on the WhaleFest 2014 can be found in the Secretariat's Outreach and Education Report ([AC21/Doc.5.2](#)).

#### **17 March 2014**

##### **Danish Natura 2000 Dialogue Forum**

###### **Participation for ASCOBANS: Geneviève Desportes (ASCOBANS North Sea Plan Coordinator)**

The 8th meeting of the Danish Natura 2000 Dialogforum was hosted by the Danish Agrifish Agency, Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (Copenhagen). The Dialogforum provides a platform for a dialog on fisheries management and protection measures in Natura 2000 marine areas between the Ministries of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Environment, the scientific institutions, the environmental NGOs and the fisheries organisations, both professional and recreational. Attendance to meetings varies according to agendas. The agenda for the March meeting included points related to the protection of harbour porpoises and the expected regional cooperation regarding conservation recommendations for Natura 2000 marine areas. Points directly of interest to ASCOBANS were an update on Danish projects related to the conservation of harbour porpoises. The data collection of the project on gillnet by-catch monitoring using CCTV cameras in the inner Danish waters would be shortly completed. A similar project was running in areas 22 and 23 and should be completed in summer 2015. A project collecting on the distribution of porpoises in the area using CPODS was completed with 2.5 year-data and the results would be use as background data for estimating the impact of using pingers on porpoise distribution. Under the pinger project, the use of pingers would become mandatory in the Great Belt for a period of a year for all net-fisheries, both commercial and recreational. The acquisition of pingers would be the sole responsibility of the fishermen, with no economical compensation from the state. A full update of the Danish projects can be found on the Agrifish agency's website<sup>3</sup>. Reporting porpoise bycatch had become mandatory for the

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<sup>3</sup> An update [in Danish] on the projects from April 2014 can be found at [http://naturerhverv.dk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/NaturErhverv/Filer/Fiskeri/Natura\\_2000\\_hav/Marsvin/Opdateret\\_bilag\\_4\\_april\\_2014.pdf](http://naturerhverv.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/NaturErhverv/Filer/Fiskeri/Natura_2000_hav/Marsvin/Opdateret_bilag_4_april_2014.pdf)

fishery inspectors, also for recreational fisheries, and special fields had been added in the reporting schemes. Information was given on how joint recommendation for regulation in Natura 2000 areas should be proposed in cooperation by the countries having interest in the areas, thus calling for regional cooperation. Another meeting of the Dialogforum was held in late June, but harbour porpoises were not on the agenda and ASCOBANS was not represented.

#### **15-17 April 2014**

#### **9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee**

##### **Participation for ASCOBANS: Sami Hassani (France)**

The report of the meeting, which includes many relevant agenda items, as well as all documents for its consideration and information, are available from the [ACCOBAMS website](#).

#### **5-9 April 2014**

#### **27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society, incl. Workshops**

##### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat)**

##### 6 April:

ASCOBANS, with the invaluable support of Peter Evans, had taken the lead in organizing the joint ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Workshop on "*Introducing noise into the marine environment: what are the requirements for an impact assessment for marine mammals?*". The ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Secretariat staff present jointly handled the registration and collection of the workshop fees of the approx. 120 participants. This workshop was the best attended of the conference. The agenda is attached. Peter Evans plans to produce proceedings, as was done for previous workshops.

Preceding the workshop was a closed meeting of those members of the Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group that were present in Liège. It was mainly used to allow experts to meet each other, and provide comments on the draft work programme for the Group, based on the ToR agreed by Parties.

##### 7-9 April:

On these days, the Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society took place. The theme for this year was "Marine mammals as sentinels of a changing environment". Presentations covered research on a wide range of subjects, with pollution and its effects on the health and fitness of marine mammals a frequently recurring theme. In this light it was very timely that hardcopies of the proceedings of the 2011 ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Workshop on Chemical Pollution and Marine Mammals were distributed through the conference bags.

Nick Trengenza (Chelonia Ltd.), the inventor of T-PODs and C-PODs for passive acoustic monitoring and the banana pinger for bycatch prevention, received this year's conservation award. The accolade given upon presentation of the award can be accessed at: <http://mrsimmondssays.blogspot.de/2014/04/ecs-conservation-award.html>

As always, the attendance at the ECS meeting has proven extremely useful, as it allows personally meeting the researchers and conservationists doing the field work, increasing their understanding of what ASCOBANS is doing and enhancing the Coordinator's knowledge of developments in conservation science.

The speech delivered by Melchior Wathelet, Secretary of State of Belgium, at the opening of the conference was kindly provided to ASCOBANS for inclusion in this compilation (see Annex on page 18).

## 28 April - 3 May 2014

### 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CITES Animals Committee

#### Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Melanie Virtue (Secretariat)

No points of direct relevance to ASCOBANS were discussed. The report of the meeting can be accessed on the [CITES website](#).

## 15-16 April 2014

### CMS Scientific Council Workshop on the Conservation Implications of Cetacean Culture

#### Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat)

The report of this workshop has been made available as [AC21/Inf.3.7.3.b](#). The related draft resolution is contained in [AC21/Inf.3.7.3.a](#).

## 12-24 May 2014

### Meeting 65b of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC SC)

#### Participation for ASCOBANS: Mark Simmonds (HSI)

The IWC Scientific Committee met in Bled, Slovenia in May this year and its full report is online and may be found here: <https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?ref=3436>.

#### Small Cetaceans Sub-Committee

Of most relevance to ASCOBANS is the work of the Small Cetacean Sub-Committee (summarised in section 14 of the main report which includes all recommendations agreed by the full Scientific Committee and the full report of the sub-committee is in Annex L\_SM<sup>4</sup>). The Sub-Committee focused this year on a review of small cetacean populations in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea. This underlined the lack of knowledge in this area and the threat from both fisheries and loud noise. The Subcommittee also revisited its previous concerns and made recommendations about a number of threatened species and populations: vaquita, Maui's dolphins, Irrawaddy dolphin, Yangtze finless porpoise, Franciscana, boto and the Taiwanese humpback dolphins.

Further to concerns first raised last year, the ongoing 'heavy-handed' captures of belugas for the captivity trade by competing teams in the west Okhotsk sea was also highlighted. Concerns were also raised about the ongoing Russian takes of orcas.

The Committee reiterated its general position that removals should not be made from populations that have not been properly assessed.

The Committee agreed to trial a new intersessional approach for situations that are considered high priority from a conservation perspective at the species or population level, especially where the indications are that time is short and no mitigation actions are in place. The sub-committee would establish an intersessional 'task team' of appropriate experts

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<sup>4</sup> Annex L\_SM is available here: <https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?ref=3436>

from its membership. Task teams would undertake a thorough review of the situation, consulting with local research groups, authorities and others as appropriate, provide written information to the relevant authorities (through the chairs of the sub-committee and Committee in consultation with the Secretariat) if required, and provide scientific or mitigation advice as appropriate. Task Teams would report back to the sub-committee on progress at its next meeting. Work will continue intersessionally to better define this task team approach.

### **Environmental Concerns and Human Induced Mortality**

Work in these areas is generally progressing well, including revised plans for pollution studies and ship strikes (a particular concern was noted about the effects of ship-strikes on blue whales off Sri Lanka). An exception to the good progress might be the topic of **climate change** and a plan to restart work in this work area led to a climate change steering group meeting in August 2014 at the University of Glasgow and this group will feed recommendations back to the Scientific Committee and Commission intended to revitalise this important over-arching concern.

Recent work on **chemical pollution** has included the finalisation of an individual-based model that can be used to investigate the effects of pollution (particularly polychlorinated biphenyl or PCB) exposure on cetacean populations. Work on prioritising current contaminants of concern for cetaceans remains important to the Standing Working Group and it was agreed to add the issue of adsorbed chemicals from microplastics to a questionnaire that will be circulated among experts for input on chemicals of concern.

The Committee held a workshop in 2013 that sought to define and understand the adverse impacts of **marine debris** on cetaceans. This reported into the 2014 Scientific Committee meeting. Additional information presented included that debris ingestion has been documented in 48 cetacean species, with rates of ingestion in necropsied stranded carcasses as high as 74% in some areas. A key recommendation of the first IWC workshop on marine debris was that information on rates of debris interactions should be reported annually by country to the IWC. A second marine debris workshop under the auspices of the Conservation Committee was held in Hawaii in the first week of August 2014 and its report will become public in September. Its focus was on the management and mitigation of the threat. (The IWC also has an active programme of work focused on rescue of entangled whales.)

### **Other matters**

Many other matters were discussed at the 2014 meeting of the scientific committee, including *inter alia*:

- the issue of how to progress the Committee's review of Japan's scientific whaling further to the findings of the International Court of Justice verdict delivered in March have been referred back to the Commission meeting in September;
- a Strike-Limit-Algorithm (SLA) for Greenland's take of humpback whales was agreed (subject to some small fine-tuning);
- developments at Sakhalin which concern the management of potential threats from oil and gas development to the local grey whale feeding ground;
- whale-watching developments, including grave concerns about dolphin watching in Bocco de Tores; and
- How to equitably divide and agree the Scientific Committee's budget.

13-16 May 2014

## 16th Meeting of the Nature Protection and Biodiversity Group (HELCOM HABITAT 16/2014)

### Participation for ASCOBANS: Penina Blankett (Finland)

The meeting was chaired by Penina Blankett (Finland)

**The following harbour porpoise-related issues were taken up under the item Nature conservation and biodiversity; endangered species and habitats.**

- **Reports from countries**

Germany: The Meeting took note of the information by Germany on a project that is recording underwater noise by deploying loggers to record noise from, inter alia, ships. The project is currently surveying an area using both noise loggers and C-pods aimed at recording sounds from ships and offshore constructions, as well as harbour porpoises.

- **Report from the ASCOBANS work**

The Meeting took note of the outcome of the 10<sup>th</sup> Jastarnia Group Meeting as presented by Ms Penina Blankett, Finland.

- **SAMBAH presentation**

The Meeting welcomed the presentation on harbour porpoise acoustic monitoring by the SAMBAH project, as presented by Ms Julia Carlström, AquaBiota Water Research. The project aims to measure the abundance of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise, provide distribution maps, increase the awareness of the species and demonstrate best practices. All data analyses will be finalised by the end of the year 2014. The final conference of the project will be held on 8–9 December 2014 in Kolmården, Sweden.

- **Harbour porpoise data base**

The Meeting noted that the SAMBAH project is using the data included in the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database and encouraged the Contracting Parties to submit their observations to the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database by filling in the reporting form and sending it to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) at least once per year.

- **Harbour porpoise information**

The Meeting welcomed the information leaflet on the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise provided by the CCB (document 3-2).

The meeting documents are available on the HELCOM [website](#).

11 June 2014

## ACCOBAMS Expert Workshop on the Impact of Climate Change on Cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Seas

### Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) & Mark Simmonds (HSI)

The ACCOBAMS workshop on The Impact of Climate Change on Cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Seas met in Monaco on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Seventeen experts from eight countries from across the ACCOBAMS region and beyond attended, including representatives from a number of international organisations and members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.

The workshop considered the latest pronouncements from the IPCC, noting that ecosystems change has already been identified in the region. The situations in the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins were reviewed and the workshop received a number of detailed reports of ongoing research in the region and pertinent investigations being conducted elsewhere. In addition, the work proposed on climate change under the auspices of the Convention for Migratory Species was considered and the workshop expressed its appreciation and support for these plans.

Discussion led to the identification of the need to build better synergies between various research efforts and international bodies, and the identification of particular knowledge gaps, including a lack of basic knowledge about cetacean populations which is especially pronounced in some areas. The importance of the maintenance of long-term studies and was emphasised along with the value of cetaceans as sentinels of ecosystem health and indicators of climate change.

The workshop recognised climate change as a profound threat to the cetaceans of the region and made two sets of recommendation, the first aimed at policy makers and the second concerning future research. These recommendations may be found below.

The workshop was hosted by the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and part-sponsored by the Humane Society International.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Key messages to Governments and others**

1. Whilst gaps remain in our knowledge, there is evidence that climate change, especially in combination with other pressures, presents a profound threat to cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS region.
2. More attention needs to be given generally to the effects of climate change in the marine environment, and the Mediterranean and Black Seas are globally amongst the ecosystems most likely to be rapidly impacted, leading to further biodiversity loss.
3. Cetaceans have a value as sentinels of the ecosystem effects of climate change and we recommend their consideration in the development of indicators for environmental status to be used in relation to ongoing international initiatives.
4. Whilst investigations and wider actions continue related to climate change, every effort should be made to address all of the stressors adversely impacting cetaceans in order to help mitigate climate change effects.
5. Significant opportunities exist at this time to develop positive synergies in the work being conducted on climate change across a number of MEAs and we encourage strengthening of cooperation and actions.
6. The workshop supports the draft resolution of CMS "Programme of Work on Climate Change and Migratory Species" and welcomes the opportunities for collaboration. It invites CMS and ACCOBAMS to liaise closely to identify joint activities and synergies.
7. Increasing capacity-building and public awareness activities are of high importance, and we note the importance of marine protected areas in this regard.
8. In addition, we advocate the research recommendations below and encourage their ongoing funding.

### **B. Research Recommendations and Requirements**

#### *B.1 Recommendations directed to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee*

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee should:

1. Proceed with the ACCOBAMS Basin-Wide Survey Initiative, which should be repeated at regular intervals.
2. Look for opportunities for other means for data collection to include cetaceans and physical and chemical data into ongoing data collection (e.g. annual survey in the Black Sea and MISTRALS<sup>1</sup> project in the Med) and contact project coordinators of MEDITS and MEDIAS<sup>2</sup> to provide collected data.
3. Consider the issue of assessing resilience and adaptation of cetaceans to climate change.

#### *B.2. General Research Recommendations*

1. Ensure the continuation of existing long term projects (>10 years) relevant to the conservation of cetaceans, and support the initiation of new long-term projects In such studies, data collection should be at least annual, and
  - Individual-based longitudinal studies should assess the effects on life cycles,
  - Demographic parameters should be correlated with climatic parameters; and
  - Further effort should be made to evaluate the feasibility of demographic studies.
2. Increased use should be made of platforms of opportunities to provide regular data collection (relating to: presence, distribution, relative abundance).
3. More effort should be made to
  - Collect information to improve knowledge about prey and cetaceans (e.g. through acoustic, long term historical data sets, the environmental history of cetaceans etc.);
  - Investigate prey-predator relationships;
  - Overlap maps of cetacean distribution with maps of impacts (including climate change);
  - Overlap maps of geochemical tracers of preys with ISOSCAPE maps;
  - Increase the cetacean differentiation when modeling the Med through Ecosim; and
  - Reinforce the links between the climate modeler community and ecologists.

The report and related documents are available on the [ACCOBAMS website](#).

#### **23-27 June 2014**

##### **First United Nations Environment Assembly**

##### **Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Bradnee Chambers (Secretariat)**

The advance English copy of the proceedings is available on the [UNEP website](#).

#### **23-28 June 2014**

##### **Eighteenth meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-18)**

The full report of the meeting is accessible [here](#).

**7-11 July 2014**

**65<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee**

**Participation for CMS & ASCOBANS: Melanie Virtue (Secretariat) & Maj Munk (Denmark)**

No points of direct relevance to ASCOBANS were discussed. The report of the meeting can be accessed on the [CITES website](#).

**15-18 September 2014**

**65<sup>th</sup> Annual Commission Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC)**

**Participation for ASCOBANS: United Kingdom**

Given the proximity to the Advisory Committee meeting, the United Kingdom will provide an oral briefing of the key outcomes of IWC65 to AC21.

The full report of the meeting will be made available on the [IWC website](#).

EUROPEAN CETACEAN SOCIETY - 28th ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
LIEGE, 7 APRIL 2014

**SPEECH OF SECRETARY OF STATE MELCHIOR WATHELET**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today in Liege at the Aquarium for your annual meeting, organised this year by the University of Liege.

First of all, as a Secretary of State for Environment, Mobility and Energy, I can only be worried about the impact of certain human activities on sea mammals, especially cetaceans, in Europe and in the world. This year's theme, **'Marine mammals as sentinels of a changing environment'**, is more than appropriate. Cetaceans are indeed altogether highlight species and sentinel species for the health of our marine environment.

Developing human activities and their impact on both big and small cetaceans, require increased knowledge and alertness from scientists to raise awareness among policy makers, the general public and the whole civil society. The scientific programme of the present colloquium sufficiently demonstrates the real threat for species and habitat conservation, making any sustainable use of resources and ecosystems impossible in the long term if no appropriate measures are taken.

I would like to point out some key elements to which Belgium pays special attention and for which we are capable of making things change:

1° Belgium favours international cooperation at scientific as well as political and legal level. Tools do exist, but they are often **'avoided'** by interpreting the legislation in a very large way : some countries, for instance, keep on hunting whales for commercial purposes despite the current moratorium of the International Whaling Commission. Or, like Japan, they grant themselves so-called scientific permits for catching and killing whales under cover of research programmes. The same countries make objections to the CITES or CMS conventions for species that are known to be in danger.

2° With regard to this, Belgium, ten years after joining the Commission, will have the honour of presiding the International Whaling Commission (IWC) for 2 years as from September oncoming. This is altogether a challenge and an opportunity to transcend the divide between pro- and anti-hunting parties. Action should be based on the qualitative work of the IWC's scientific committee and its recommendations: the nature of threats has changed and appropriate measures must be taken: lethal catches for commercial hunting or scientific research are no longer justified in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides, death causes resulting from human activities keep on growing: collisions with ships, accidental by-catches in fisheries and entangling in fishing nets represent new threats that are being closely investigated after several groundings of sea mammals that appeal to all of us.

Moreover, environmental concerns are gaining in importance: marine waste, contaminations, oil pollution and infectious diseases transform those sentinels into **'patients'** that should be taken care of. Underwater noise and offshore energy are also becoming a source of concern.

3° Despite that divide between pro- and anti-hunting parties, the IWC remains a key organization for cetacean conservation : the moratorium on commercial hunting must be renewed, existing sanctuaries must be enhanced and the creation of new ones is on the agenda, the development of whale observation with positive social and economic consequences is in full expansion. At scientific level, the development of non-lethal research

programmes, such as the Southern Ocean Research Partnership (SORP) involving 10 countries, demonstrates the inconsistency of scientific hunting programmes for cetaceans that end up in a few people's plates. The work of the IWC is also crucial for taking risk management and mitigation measures on commercial shipping within the International Maritime Organization (IMO): separation of maritime routes from the routes and zones used by cetaceans, voyage planning, appropriate vessel speed reduction, training and awareness programme for industry and seamen, this is a series of concrete measures for which I am claiming for support and enhancement within the IMO. I have also granted financial support for a brochure on collisions with ships, – that you will find during the colloquium or on the FPS website –, that has been largely spread among the different parties involved in collisions with ships.

4° Finally, I would like to reaffirm the essential role of knowledge for policy making and for a constructive dialogue between science and policy at national and regional, but also international level. In Belgium, the academic world, the science institutions and the administrations concerned work hand in hand, as it has once again been proven today.

5° I will end this intervention by pointing out the absence of effective protection of small cetaceans, that are no major concern of international legal rules, but that are victims of unregulated hunting and catching. The IWC is equally worried and the scientific and conservation work conducted by the Commission provides scientific information that is essential to the different countries and decision makers, even though Japan and other pro-hunting countries deny it to be added to the Convention. This is why I am urging for the largest possible cooperation between the IWC and other international treaties among which CITES and CMS and their regional agreements ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS.

Finally, I would like to recall that the United States have a strict and efficient legislation specific for marine mammals, which resulted notably in not allowing the importation of Belugas caught in Russia that would have passed in transit through Liege Airport. The European Union should be thinking about doing the same.

To conclude, I call for organizing soon a Round Table between scientists, NGOs and national and international policy makers in order to lay down together, in a constructive and responsible way, new rules for the assessment and management of risks run by cetaceans. Belgium is ready to participate actively in this event and to follow up the measures resulting from that meeting.

Thank you for your attention.